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To the Calligraphy of Chusa

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The Exercise

A fish
did not know
what water was.
On asking,
the wisest fish
answered:
if you want to know
what water is
get out of the water.

*Translated by Susana Heringman
with Donald Justice*

To the Calligraphy of Chusa *

A dragon with a writhing body and a beating tail, tearing the heaven with
his scales;
An angry tiger with flashing eyes, leaping up and down an immense crag;
But now the dragon, being helpless, begs power of you;
The tiger, deprived of his muscles, can no longer leap.

What innocent baby would gaze at your strokes without fear? What
emperor's tyranny?
What lunatic or what devil could mimic your breathtaking feat?
What swallow's flight could assume your perfect grace more easily yielded

*"Chusa" is an alias of Kim Chong-hi (1786-1856), a distinguished scholar and calligrapher, admired in Korea as a completely original artist.

Than silk from a silkworm? What fairy's flowing robe has ever enjoyed it?

Your cornerstones, pillars, beams, and even the tiny nails driven into them
Sink in a deep slumber, enchanted by their own complete forms and weights,
Like indifferent minerals, scattered, at random, over the mountains.
Yet they keep awakened, their strict positions like the constellations in the
sky.

Cubism and fauvism, those whirlwinds of the century, take their origin in
you;
Deformation, by virtue of you, becomes a worthy mechanism. By virtue of
you,
Depression, heaped up like a pyramid, scatters. Inflated egotism becomes
incandescent.
The age-old mustiness in the walls vanishes. The sea-wind with ozone in it,
blows in.

What wisdom could unravel the meaning of your expression in strange
laughter?
What rod, that crushes up impurities, could be merciless like you?
The water, earth and wind of Korea, by which you were fostered,
Treasure forever a far-reaching pride for the thundering flaps of your wings.

Translated by Kim Chong-Gil

MOSHE DOR / ISRAEL

Progression

Even more terrible than crumbling, the dark
feeling of niches, the jokes
of purposeless entrances and exits,
the conflagration
of maple leaves like a forewarning:
but to keep silent?
A temporary solution, the memory of your body,
and more limited, of your breast,